Illinois Department of Public Health Q & A – Zika Virus

Q. What is Zika virus?

A. Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness spread primarily through mosquito bites – similar to how West Nile virus or dengue virus is TRANSMITTED.

Q. What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

- A. The most common symptoms of Zika are:
 - ° fever
 - ° rash
 - ° joint pain, and/or
 - ° conjunctivitis (red eyes).
 - ° Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache.

Q. How is Zika virus spread?

A. Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito. It is NOT transmitted through sneezing or coughing, like the flu.

Q. Is Zika virus spread through sexual contact?

A. It is important to remember that Zika virus is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. In rare instances, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact has been reported.

Because it's possible Zika virus can be transmitted through sex and because our primary concern is the protection of pregnant women, we recommend that men who either live in or have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission and who have a pregnant sex partner should either (1) consistently and correctly use condoms during sex, or (2) abstain from sexual activity during the duration of pregnancy.

Q. How serious is Zika virus?

A. About 1 in 5 people INFECTED with Zika virus will become sick. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon and deaths are rare. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week, but it can be found longer in some people.

Q. Does Zika virus cause birth defects?

A. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly (a condition in which a baby's head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age) and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. More research is being done on the nature of this association and with each passing day, the linkage between Zika and microcephaly becomes stronger.



CDC recommends that women who are pregnant or are trying to become pregnant:

- ° Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
- ° If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your doctor first and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

Pregnant women with or without symptoms of Zika virus who did travel to a place where Zika virus was spreading should be offered testing between 2 and 12 weeks after returning from areas with ongoing Zika virus transmission. Pregnant women should be prioritized for testing for Zika virus.

Q. Are there cases of Zika virus in Illinois?

A. As of February 8, 2016, IDPH is reporting three confirmed, travel-related cases of Zika virus in Illinois residents. Two cases are in pregnant women and the third in a man. These individuals traveled separately to Colombia, Haiti and Honduras. The locations of these residents are not being released as there is no risk to the public of transmission of the virus.

With the recent outbreaks in other countries where Zika virus has been found, the number of Zika virus disease cases among travelers visiting or returning to the United States will likely increase, although we cannot predict by how much.

Q. Are Illinoisans at risk of Zika virus? Do the mosquitoes in Illinois carry the virus?

A. The risk of Zika virus to Illinoisans is very low. Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito and not person-to-person like the flu. The principal type of mosquito that carries Zika virus (*Aedes aegypti*) has rarely been found in Illinois. It is more prevalent in tropical climates and cannot survive the freezing temperatures in Illinois.

Q. What if people have returned from traveling to one of these countries? Should they see a doctor? How recent would travel need to be?

A. People should see their health care provider if they develop the symptoms described above within two weeks of traveling to an area where Zika virus is present. People should tell their health care provider when and where they traveled, and their activities.

Health care providers who believe a patient may be infected with Zika virus should contact their local health department to discuss testing.

Q. Should people cancel travel to these countries?

A. Because Zika virus is spread primarily by mosquitoes, CDC recommends that all travelers protect themselves from this disease by taking steps to prevent mosquito bites - use insect repellent, wear long sleeves and pants, and stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens.



CDC recommends that pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other health care provider first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip. Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their health care provider before traveling to these areas and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.

- Q. If a person is infected with Zika virus, how long does the virus last?
- A. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week but it can be found longer in some people.
- Q. Are you immune for life once infected?
- A. According to the CDC, once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.
- Q. What is Illinois doing to prepare for Zika virus, especially as the weather warms up?
- A. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), in partnership with local health departments and hospitals across Illinois, has a robust surveillance system (Illinois National Electronic Disease Surveillance System), which includes Zika virus.

IDPH has issued guidance to local health departments, hospitals, infectious disease physicians, and infections control preventionists about Zika virus. IDPH has also provided direction on what health care providers should look for and do, as well as providing a laboratory testing protocol. IDPH is in the process of obtaining certification from CDC to test for Zika virus.

